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BRIGGS'
AMERICAN TANNER

CONTAINING

QUICK AND HANDY METHODS

OF

CURING, TANNING, AND COLORING

THE SKINS OF THE SHEEP, GOAT, DOG, RABBIT,
OTTER, BEAVER, MUSKRAT, MINK, WOLF,
FOX, ETC., AND OTHER HEAVIER HIDES

FULLY ILLUSTRATED

NEW YORK
DICK & FITZGERALD
18 ANN STREET

THE AMERICAN TANNER.

CONTAINING

IMPROVED AND QUICK METHODS

OF

CURING, TANNING, AND COLORING

THE SKINS OF THE SHEEP, GOAT, DOG, RABBIT,
OTTER, BEAVER, MUSKRAT, MINK, WOLF,
FOX, ETC., AND OTHER HEAVIER HIDES;

INCLUDING

A PLAIN DESCRIPTION OF THE NECESSARY UTENSILS, AND
PRACTICAL DIRECTIONS FOR THEIR USE.

FULLY ILLUSTRATED.

By N. R. BRIGGS.

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THE AMERICAN TANNER.

IMPROVED METHODS OF TANNING.

THIS work is especially gotten up for the tanning of all light skins, such as sheep, goat, dog, rabbit, otter, beaver, muskrat, mink, wolf, fox, etc.

For heavier skins than the above, see receipt under heading of "heavy leather tan," No. 7.

The receipt for tanning with acid, No. 15, is particularly valuable in tanning sheep-skins for making up into rugs and dusters for the market, where time is of value.

UTENSILS.

In commencing operations for tanning, it is necessary first to fit yourself

out with the necessary apparatus, which consists of:

1st. Two or more good strong tubs, as shown in Fig. 1. These may be made by cutting in half any good tight barrel

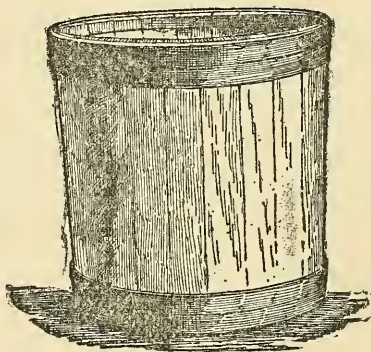


Fig. 1.

or hogshead. The style shown in the illustration answers very well for a few skins.

2d. A fleshing-knife, as shown in Fig. 2, may be made from an old drawing-knife or piece of scythe, by grinding the edge down to about a thirty-second of

an inch; this will give two edges to work with by reversing, and of sufficient

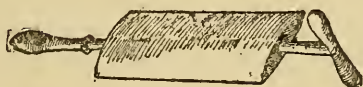


Fig. 2.

sharpness to remove all fleshy and fatty substances from a skin.

3d. For a fleshing-beam as shown in Fig. 3, select a fine grained, hard-wood

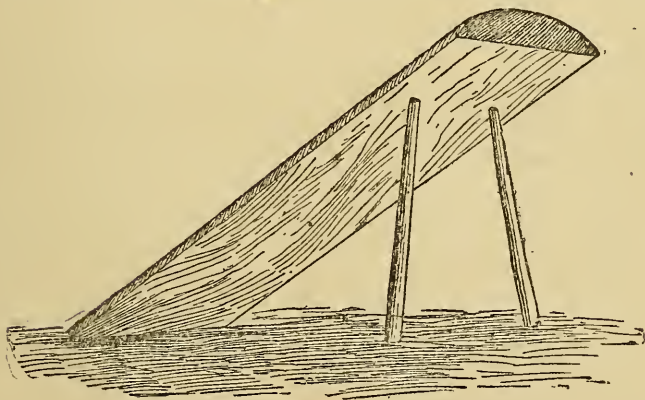


Fig. 3.

slab, about seven feet long, and about fifteen inches wide. Have the round

side up; put in two legs about two feet from one end of the slab, the other end rests on the floor, as shown in the illustration.

PREPARING THE HIDES OR SKINS.

Before skin can be subjected to tanning, it requires some preliminary preparation. This consists in soaking the skin, and afterwards carefully removing all fatty and fleshy matter. A description of how this may be done is given in Nos. 1, 2 and 3, as follows:

No. 1.—TO SOAK THE HIDES OR SKINS.

To soak skins, take four gallons cold soft water, one-half pint soft-soap, one-half ounce of borax, (if the skins have not been salted, add to the above, one-half pint salt, and if to be tanned with the hair on, add three-quarters of an

ounce of sulphuric acid, which will set the hair on on the skins). Now thoroughly dissolve and mix, and place the skins in this bath, and allow to soak from two to six hours. This part of the process is to make the skins soft and pliable, ready for the fleshing-beam.

NO. 2.—TO REMOVE THE HAIR OR WOOL.

If it is desired to remove the hair or wool from a skin, omit the sulphuric acid in the above bath for soaking, No. 1, and after soaking, put the skins in a liquor composed of five gallons cold water, four quarts slaked lime, four quarts of hard-wood ashes, and allow to soak from one to six days; or until the hair slips off easily. As soon as this can be done, remove to the fleshing-

beam, and with the fleshing-knife scrape off the hair or wool, and then turn the skin over and flesh as described in No. 3, then wash thoroughly in cold water, and again remove to fleshing-beam, and with the fleshing-knife sleek by scraping off all the greasy water. The skins are now ready for the tan liquor, as described in Nos. 4 and 7, according as they are heavy or light.

NO. 3.—FLESHING A SKIN.

Fleshing a skin is done by placing the skin on the fleshing-beam, flesh side up, and with the fleshing-knife (already described) all the fleshy and fatty substances are carefully removed, care being taken with the very light skins not to cut them. It is very important that this part of the work of removing every par-

ticle of the fleshy and fatty substance be well done before putting the skins into the tan liquor, if you wish to have the skins evenly and quickly tanned. The fleshing-beam may be also used to place the skins on for removing the hair or wool, and for sleeking and stretching the skins, after some of the other processes herein described.

NO. 4.—TAN LIQUOR FOR LIGHT SKINS.

To eight quarts of cold soft water add one-quarter of a pound of pulverized oxalic acid, one quart of common salt. Dissolve well and immerse the skins.

The quantity of material prescribed in each of the receipts, is given on the basis of treating one skin of the size of a calf or sheep-skin, while smaller skins, such as muskrat, mink, etc., as many

may be put in as can be kept submerged and easily handled.

The whole skin, no matter whether containing wool, hair or fur, should be kept entirely submerged. (Enough tan liquor should be made to cover the skins well.) They should be turned occasionally, so that all parts of the skins may come in contact with the tan liquor. Very light skins should remain in this liquor from three to four hours. Calfskins are not considered light skins, and should remain in the liquor from twenty-four to forty-eight hours; or until tanned through, which can be told by cutting on the neck, the thickest part of the skin. If the tan color, that is given to the skins, by the use of terra japonica (gum catechu) as mentioned for heavy hides in No. 7, is no objection, it would be well to tan calf-

skin with the tan liquor of No. 7; otherwise, use as here described, which leaves the skin a pure white color. When thoroughly tanned, remove and wash in cold water and hang up to partially dry, then proceed with No. 5.

NO. 5.—FINISHING LIGHT SKINS.

All skins when drying are like full cloth when wet; they contract or full up, and have to be stretched. To do this, take the skin before it is thoroughly dried, and place it upon the fleshing-beam, over some yielding substance, such as a sheep-skin flesh side up; then use the fleshing-knife; by pushing the edge of the blade stoutly in all directions over the leather it will become stretched; then remove to a strong table and roll until soft and pliable, and then follow directions in No. 6.

No. 6.—GLOVE LEATHER LIQUID.

✓ This liquid should be applied to all light skins, when extra softness is desirable, after tanning and finishing, and, when thoroughly dried in, should be again rolled upon the table until soft and pliable. It is made by mixing one pint of soft-soap, one pint of tanners' or neats-foot oil, one-half pint of alcohol, and thoroughly rubbing into the flesh side of the skin; without this the leather and furs would not be fit for their various uses.

No. 7.—TAN LIQUOR FOR HEAVY HIDES.

The light leather tan liquor leaves the leather too open or porous for leather that is to be exposed to water and rough usage. Therefore, add to the tan liquor for light skins: Three-

quarters of a pound melted terra japonica (gum catechu); melt with water, and proceed the same as with light skins, giving more time in the tan liquor—say from two to ten days, according to the thickness of the skin. When sufficiently tanned, remove from the liquor, and thoroughly wash, and follow directions given in No. 8, finishing heavy hides.

NO. 8.—FINISHING HEAVY HIDES.

After taking the hides out of the tan liquor, they must be thoroughly washed, and scoured upon the grain side (the side the hair was taken off), if that is to be blacked; for the acid in the tan liquor, if any should remain, kills the coloring material in the grain black. Scouring is done by placing the hides

upon a table grain side up, and, with a good stiff brush (a scrubbing-brush will answer) and water, go over the hides thoroughly, using considerable strength, and then hang up. When half dried, apply the preparation under the heading of "Waterproof Stuffing," No. 9, spreading on a quantity about a third as thick as the hide to which you apply it.

NO. 9.—WATERPROOF STUFFING.

One pint rye or wheat flour, four ounces bees-wax, three ounces each of pine pitch and barberry gum, two pounds beef tallow; melt together over a slow fire; then add one quart of tanners' or neat's-foot oil, one quart boiled linseed oil; take off the fire and mix in one-half pint of alcohol; stir until cooled. If a polish is required, for

boot or harness leather, melt four ounces of gum tragacanth with water, in a vessel placed in a kettle of boiling water, to which add one-half ounce of lamp black; when fully melted stir it into the waterproof stuffing while the latter is cooling. A good coating of this stuffing should be applied to the hides and then hung in the shade until dry; then whiten or sleek, that is, remove all the stuffing that has not dried in; then remove to the table and bowl (that is work by rolling until soft and pliable). If the grain side is to be blacked, it should be treated with grain blacking Nos. 10 or 11, both of which are good.

NO. 10.—GRAIN BLACKING.

Take two ounces terra japonica (gum catechu), one-half ounce extract of log-

wood, one ounce of copperas, one quart of zeig (urine), and melt together over a slow fire. Before applying the blacking, sponge the grain side of the leather with old zeig (urine), then sleek or scrape off the urine. Repeat the operation; then apply the blacking while warm with a very stiff brush, rubbing it thoroughly in. If it does not produce a beautiful black readily, apply a light coat of soft-soap, rubbing it smartly with the hands; then immediately apply the glove leather liquid (No. 6), or the copperas in the blacking would injure the grain; then hang in the shade to dry. When about dry apply a light coat of waterproof stuffing (No. 9), rubbing it well into the leather. If a polish is desired, apply the waterproof stuffing with the gum tragacanth added, in the manner sug-

gested in No. 9, and after allowing to dry in, polish with any hard smooth substance, using considerable strength. If it is also desired to black the flesh side, follow directions as given in No. 12,—flesh side blacking.

NO. 11.—ANOTHER GRAIN BLACKING.

To stain the grain side of a skin a permanent black, rub well with a strong aqueous solution of proto-sulphate of iron, and then with a concentrated solution of extract of logwood.

NO. 12.—FLESH SIDE BLACKING.

To one pint of soft-soap, add two ounces lampblack, one-half ounce pulverized copperas: boil over a slow fire ten minutes; after cooling, reduce with

water to the consistency of molasses, and apply with a stiff brush; then sponge with glove liquid (No. 6). Allow to dry in, then apply some of the waterproof stuffing and gum tragacanth (No. 9), and polish.

NO. 13.—TANNING MUSKRAT SKINS.

The muskrat skin being very tender, and the flesh very tough, the skin will not bear fleshing without laying in the tan liquor for light skins (No. 4) at least one hour; then take it out and place on the flesh side of a sheep-skin and carefully flesh. After this, replace in the tan liquor, and let it remain at least three hours more; then thoroughly wash in cold water, and finish as described in finishing light skins. (See No. 5.)

No. 14.—TO ENLIVEN FURS.

Furs may be enlivened by taking equal parts of scorched bran and sharp clean white sand or hard-wood saw-dust, and rub in the fur until it becomes free and bright; then shake out.

No. 15.—TANNING WITH ACID.

Soak and wash in the usual way, described in No. 1. Then take oil of vitriol (sulphuric acid) and water, equal parts of each, and thoroughly wet the *flesh side of the skin only*, letting it act on the skin for twenty minutes only. In the meantime get ready a solution of sal-soda and water, say one pound to a bucket of water, and soak the skin in that for two hours; then remove and thoroughly wash in clean cold water, and apply a little dry salt and let it

remain on for eight or ten hours. Then remove to the fleshing-beam and flesh. When dry, or nearly so, soften by pulling and rolling with the hands and a piece of pumice stone. This is the quickest way of tanning, and by only wetting the skin with acid and soaking out in twenty minutes, they are not rotted.

This receipt is especially valuable for tanning sheep-skins for making up into rugs and dusters, as hereinafter described.

NO. 16.—HOW TO TAN A MUSKRAT SKIN.

After washing the hide or skin in hot water, and removing all fatty and fleshy matter, prepare a liquor by mixing together the following ingredients: ten gallons of cold soft water,

eight quarts of wheat bran, one half pint old soft soap, one ounce borax, one pint salt. This quantity will be sufficient for six or seven skins.

Soak the hides in this liquor for eight or ten hours, if they are fresh; or until very soft, if the hides have been previously dried.

The salt must be omitted if the hides have already been salted; and the addition of two ounces sulphuric acid to the liquor will prepare the skins in about one half the time. The hides will then be ready for the tanning liquor, which is made of the following materials: ten gallons warm soft water, one half bushel bran, two and one half pounds sulphuric acid. Stir the bran into the water until thoroughly mixed, and let it stand in a warm room until it ferments. When this takes place,

add the sulphuric acid by degrees, and with constant stirring.

This quantity will be sufficient to tan six or seven skins.

Soak the muskrat skins in this for about four hours; then take them out and rub them with a fleshing knife.

In order to render the skin soft and pliable, it must be rubbed over a smooth beam until dry. (See No. 13.)

NO. 17.—HOW TO TAN RABBIT-SKINS.

Lay the skin on a smooth board, the fur side undermost, and fasten it down, tightly stretched, with tinned tacks. First wash it over with a solution of common salt; then moisten the surface all over with a sponge dipped in a solution consisting of one pint warm water, two and one half

ounces alum. Repeat the sponging occasionally for three days. Then, when the skin is quite dry, take out the tacks, roll it loosely the long way, hair inside, and draw it quickly backwards and forwards through a large smooth ring until quite soft; unroll it, and roll it again the opposite way, and repeat the operation.

NO. 18.—HOW TO TAN ALL KINDS OF SKINS.

The following is a method applicable to all skins with the fur on: First trim off all useless parts, then remove all fatty matter from the inside. (If the skin is dry, it must first be softened by soaking.) Next soak the skin for an hour in warm water. After this, spread over the inside of the skin, by means of a brush, a coating of the

following mixture: one ounce borax, one ounce saltpetre, one ounce glauber salts (sulphate of soda). Water sufficient to make a thin paste.

The coating should be heavier on the thicker parts of the skin; double the skin together, coated side inwards, and put it away in a cool place. At the end of twenty-four hours, apply, in the same manner as before, a coating of a mixture consisting of one ounce sal soda, one half ounce borax, two ounces hard white soap. Melt these together slowly by heat, without allowing the mixture to boil. After coating the skin with the above, fold it together again as before, and put it in a warm place for another twenty-four hours. At the expiration of this time, take four ounces alum, eight ounces salt, two ounces saleratus. Dis-

solve these in hot water sufficient in quantity to saturate the skin; when cool enough not to scald the hands, soak the skin in it for twelve hours; then wring it out, and hang it up to dry.

The soaking and drying must be repeated two or three times, until the skin is sufficiently soft. Lastly, smooth the inside with fine sand-paper and pumice stone.

NO. 19.—COLORING FOR FURS AND WOOL.

Take equal parts of pulverized unslacked lime and litharge; mix to a thin paste with water, and apply with a brush. One or two coats will give a light buff color. By using several coats a beautiful light brown is obtained, every additional coat deepening the color. By adding ammonia and nitrate

of silver a beautiful black is produced. After taking a skin from the heavy leather tan liquor (No. 7), which contains terra japonica (gum catechu), which is a permanent coloring dye, sponge the hair or wool with a solution of lime and water, and it deepens the red shade. A strong solution of alum water will set the color.

NO. 20.—ORANGE COLOR.

For coloring a bright orange on wool, wash thoroughly so as to remove all grease, then take one ounce picric acid to each skin; dissolve the acid in temperate water (soft), using enough to cover the skin. Use alcohol or vinegar to set the color.

NO. 21.—MAGENTA COLOR.

To color a nice magenta color, take for each skin, one-half ounce magenta

crystals, and dissolve in two or three quarts of boiling hot water, stir until all dissolved and then add water enough to cover the skins. The water should not be hotter at the putting in of the skins than to comfortably admit of putting the hands in. When of the right color remove, and set with a pint of vinegar or alcohol in water enough to cover the skin.



MAKE YOUR WORK PAY.

It pays best to secure long coarse-wooled sheep-pelts, with wool say three and a half to five inches long, and after tanning and coloring them as herein described, make up as follows:

Should you have two grades of dressed pelts, one, the wool of which is from

three to four inches long, the other, four to five inches, use the short wools for rugs, and the long wools for dusters. Those intended for rugs may be colored magenta color, or a pretty yellow. Trim them to good shape, square corners and oblong, and comb out nicely with a heavy wooden comb. The long wools intended for the dusters may be colored magenta and yellow; as both make up



Fig. 4.

prettily and excel the finest feathers. Now cut a pattern like the diagram,

Fig. 4, about four and a half inches across the base, and about two inches across the top or tapered end, and five inches long. The shape at the tapered end is to give a rounded appearance when the sides are sewed together. Comb out well and sew the sides together, up and over the tapered end, when it is ready for the handles. These may be made at any wood-turning establishment, and should not cost over two or three cents apiece; are best made from white-wood or bass-wood, and in design according to fancy. They may be stained with the magenta coloring used in coloring the wool, or black, and varnished. Before putting the duster on the handle, stuff within two inches of the opening with the combings; this is to prevent the end of the handle from marring the furniture, and to give

shape to the duster; draw on the handle and securely tack. A narrow strip of black or red leather may be now tacked around the bottom to give a finish.

If you have done your work well, these are articles that will sell, and may be introduced to neighbors and the people of the nearest village or city at a good profit; fifty and seventy-five cents being a fair price for the dusters, and two to four dollars for the rugs.



HOW TO CURE SKINS.

The marketable value of fur-skins mainly depends, of course, on the quality and kind of the fur; but even the best skins will fail to command a fair price unless they are properly

cured and prepared for the furrier or tanner. In order to arrive at this result, the amateur trapper will need directions for removing the skin from the animal without spoiling it by unnecessary incisions; and also for treating the skins, when removed, in the manner which will best fit them for mercantile purposes.

There are various ways for curing small skins, the simplest being to tack it, fur inwards, on a board well stretched, and allow it to dry where it is not exposed to the sunshine or the heat of a fire. Some prefer to stretch the skin, turned inside out, over a strip of any elastic wood, such as hickory, birch, elm, etc., the edges of the skin being secured in notches cut into the bow, as seen in the accompanying illustration. (Fig. 5.)

For curing in this manner a muskrat skin, for instance, the feet are first cut off; the skin is ripped with a knife from the centre of the under-jaw down

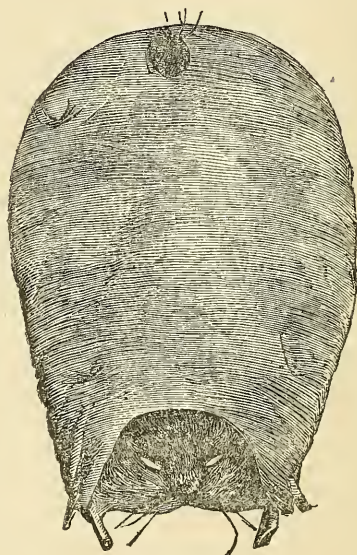


Fig. 5.

the middle of the belly, a little beyond the holes left by the fore-legs; the skin is next cut loose around the lips, ears, and eyes, and finally stripped back-

wards off the body. Stretching on a bow is not generally a good plan, as it draws the skin out of its natural shape, the usual implement used for curing small skins being the board stretcher, as it is light and portable. It consists of a piece of board, one-fourth or three-sixteenths of an inch thick; in length about eighteen inches or more; and six inches in width at one end, slightly tapering to the other end, which is rounded off to an oval with a blunt point. At the broad end, notches are cut, in which the edges of the skin, when stretched on the board, are secured. (See Fig. 5.)

An improvement on the foregoing requires a little more trouble in its construction, which is as follows: Prepare a piece of light board, about three-eighths of an inch thick, somewhat more

than two feet long; three and a half inches wide at one end, and tapering to a little over two inches wide at the other end; the narrow end is rounded,

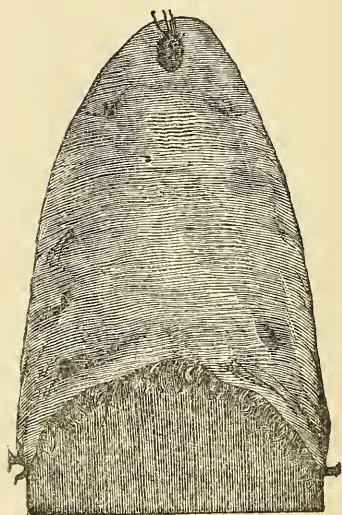


Fig. 6.

and the rounded edge beveled off. It should then be gradually thinned off its entire length, from the centre to each side, so that the edges become tolerably

thin, the centre retaining its original thickness. Next saw the board exactly down its centre. A stretcher or wedge is made of the same thickness of wood, one inch wide at one end, and three-eighths of an inch wide at the other, the same length as the other board. The two halves of the board are inserted in the skin, the wedge is then introduced between them, and being driven in, stretches the skin thoroughly. These stretchers are made of different sizes, with the same proportions, to suit the various kinds of skins, the one just described being suitable for mink and other animals of like size. (See Fig. 6.) Otter skins will require a stretcher nearly three times as large. When using these board-stretchers, the skin should be ripped along the back of the hind legs up to the vent; having cut

the edge of the skin loose around the vent, strip it from the tail, and draw the whole carefully forward, peeling it off the animal towards the head, which is the last place to be skinned. The skin is now like a long pocket, the fur side inwards, and ready for the insertion of the stretcher.

In removing the skin from the otter, and other wide-tailed animals, it will be necessary to rip the skin along the under side of the tail, and open it out stretched flat on a board.

The skin of the deer, and of some other animals, is cured by being laced with twine to the inside of a hoop, and kept drawn tight as a drum until dry. The hoop is made of hickory, or other flexible wood, and large enough to stretch the skin.

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